

RICHARD RORTY'S PRAGMATIC PILGRIMAGE

\$4.95 US \$6.25 CAN

# Linguafranca

DEC 2000/JAN 2001

THE REVIEW OF ACADEMIC LIFE

**MY LIFE  
AT THE  
O.E.D.**

**JAPAN'S  
SECRET  
TOMBS**

**NOBEL  
PRIZE  
FIGHT**

**MASTODON  
NATION**

**GEORGE W.'S  
GARAGE  
BAND**

## PET THEORY

**DO CATS CAUSE?  
SCHIZOPHRENIA?**

WWW.LINGUAFRANCA.COM







LINGUA FRANCA:

*A mixed language or jargon used in the Levant, consisting largely of Italian words deprived of their inflexions.*

*Also transf. Any mixed jargon formed as a medium of intercourse between people speaking different languages.*

Fig. 1999 WALLACE, Brief Interviews With Hideous Men.

*P. 248. "Note the rhetorically specific blend of childish diction like Hi and fib with flaccid abstractions like nurture and energy and serene. This is the lingua franca of the Inward Bound."*

## FEATURES

### 32 PET THEORY

If schizophrenia is not the product of faulty genes or faulty parents, what is it? E. Fuller Torrey smells a cat.

BY STEPHEN MIHM

### 42 THE QUEST FOR UNCERTAINTY

Richard Rorty can't handle the truth. Or rather, he has renounced its philosophical pursuit. Can he reconcile his metaphysical skepticism with his progressive politics?

BY JAMES RYERSON

### 54 THE LOST EMPERORS

Who is buried in Japan's imperial tombs? Thanks to the Imperial Household Agency, there's no way to know.

BY ALISSA QUART

### 60 THE LEXICOGRAPHER'S APPRENTICE

An expert in American slang flies to Oxford for a crash course in compiling the OED—"the oracle," as he puts it, "of an entire language."

BY JESSE SHEIDLLOWER

## DEPARTMENTS

### 9 LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### 10 FIELD NOTES

Borrowed time/Brand new world/The globalization tax, and more

### 19 BREAKTHROUGH BOOKS

The history of reading

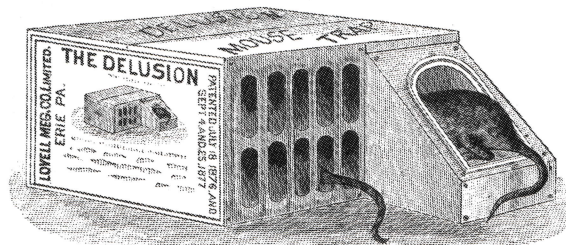
### 23 INSIDE PUBLISHING

Journal jousting/Star-spangled mastodon/Nobel nastiness, and more

### 67 CONFERENCES

### 68 HYPOTHESES

Jim Holt travels to multiple universes.



# Table of Contents



## STEALING TIME

HOW SERIOUSLY SHOULD one take the chest-thumping rhetorical flourishes of a manifesto? Abbie Hoffman may have urged his readers to “steal this book,” but surely he might have conceded that yeah, okay, he was counting on royalties. Similarly, when Jeff Schmidt pays homage to Hoffman by kicking off his recent book with the sentences “This book is stolen. Written in part on stolen time, that is,” he doesn’t mean it literally.

Or does he? His bosses thought so. The question now lies at the heart of a dispute between Schmidt and his former employers at *Physics Today*, a 121,000-circulation magazine published by the American Institute of Physics in College Park, Maryland.

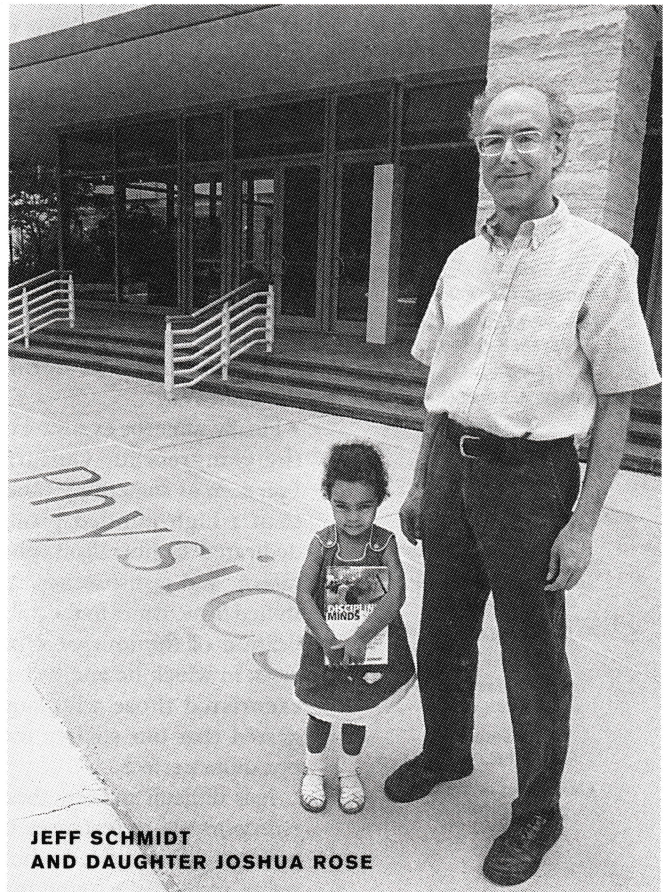
In *Disciplined Minds: A Critical Look at Salaried Professionals and the Soul-Battering System That Shapes Their Lives* (Rowman & Littlefield), Schmidt assails the conformity that professional life demands and offers some self-help-ish tips to those sweating in their white collars. After the attention-grabbing opening line, he goes on to explain what he means by “stolen time”: “Like millions of others who work for a living...my job simply didn’t leave me enough energy for a major project of my own.... So, I began spending some office time on my own work, dumped my TV to reappropriate some of my spare time

at home, and wrote this book.” Soon after his bosses read that, Schmidt says, they marched him to the human-resources office, had someone retrieve his personal effects, and told him that they never wanted to see him again. It was clear, they said, that he wasn’t “fully engaged” in his work.

Since that unhappy day, physicists and journalists have

rallied around Schmidt to try to help him get his job back. He insists he’s been canned for workplace activism and the “attitude crime” of writing a subversive book. Although he adopts a rebellious stance in his book—and describes himself as a political radical—he is a good worker, he insists. He has also taken a few baby steps away from the bold

Schmidt believes he was fired for writing a subversive book while at work.



JEFF SCHMIDT  
AND DAUGHTER JOSHUA ROSE

CHARLES STECK



claims in his introduction. "They have a one-hour unpaid lunch period and a total of a half hour of break time," Schmidt explains. "When I was working on the book during unpaid break time, it *felt* as though I was working on stolen time." The publisher of *Physics Today*, Randolph Nanna, and the human-resources director of the American Institute of Physics declined to comment on the case. But if the "stolen time" claim was the sole reason for letting Schmidt go, the incident raises an interesting question: Can you fire an employee for what he claims to have done, without checking to see if he's bluffing?

*Disciplined Minds* has more to do with academia than you'd guess from its subtitle. Inveighing against the injustices visited upon salaried professionals, Schmidt takes his own profession, physics, as his main case study. He recalls that, in 1980, the head of his graduate adviser's research group at the University of California at Irvine wanted Schmidt's dissertation typed up on a rush order, just to get rid of him—Schmidt had apparently stirred up too much trouble with his criticisms of nuclear-weapons programs and his advocacy on behalf of another student who had flunked out. The high rate of attrition in physics especially caught his attention. "What I noticed was that the dropout rate was not politically neutral," he says. "To

put it bluntly, the program favored ass kissers." As does all professional training, he might add. And exposure to such pressures leads to political conformity: He claims that in 1972, the most educated Americans were the most likely to oppose withdrawal from Vietnam.

Yet do not despair, says this veteran of the 1960s (Schmidt is fifty-four), whose book is adorned with glowing blurbs from Howard Zinn, Stanley Aronowitz, and Michael Bérubé: One can carve out space for freethinking. He urges readers to lose their hunger for compliments from superiors and to "pursue your own goals while supposedly pursuing your employer's goal." Other proposals are more out there: He reprints an army manual for surviving as a prisoner of war, with the suggestion that readers mentally "substitute 'graduate or professional school' for 'PW camp.'"

Schmidt apparently put some of these suggestions into practice. At *Physics Today*, he argued vociferously for such reforms as the elimination of salary inequities among editors and the hiring of members of minority groups. In 1997, after he refused to pipe down at a company retreat, he was warned, in writing, that his "destructive and counter-productive" behavior would no longer be tolerated. In the last couple of years, his performance evaluations were downgraded from superior to satisfactory, he says, yet he

insists he stayed ahead of schedule on his work. "He was their best articles editor before they fired him," says Jean Kumagai, who left *Physics Today* last year for *IEEE Spectrum*, an engineering magazine in New York.

So far, the American Institute of Physics has not been moved by Schmidt's pleas, nor by supportive letters from his friends and colleagues. Maryland's Department of Labor,

however, sided with him in one important matter, granting him unemployment benefits. The agency concluded that the AIP had presented insufficient information to show that his actions constituted misconduct. According to Michael Gottesman, a specialist in labor law at the Georgetown University Law Center, however, that victory won't give Schmidt much leverage in court should he

## BOY GEORGE

THE YOUNG GEORGE W. BUSH'S DAYS AS A MEDIOCRE STUDENT at Andover have been well documented. What is less well known, however, is that the most famous member of the Class of 1964 was also a peripheral member of an Andover garage-band collective called the Torqués. A group of more than two dozen musicians, stage performers, and rock 'n' roll hopefuls, the Torqués were popular for a time on the New England tea-dance and prom circuit. The collective included a number of bit performers, some called Clappers and others known as Screammers. The latter were planted in the audience to make noise and rush the stage. One of the Screammers? George W.

During its three-year existence, the band kicked out a startlingly good thirteen-song LP featuring a version of the Trashmen's "Surfin' Bird" so wild and primitive that Andover's Bach lovers once picketed a gig. "Other Andover bands like the Invictas, the Satans, and the Apostles were better," says Randy Hobler, the Torqués' lead guitarist, who today is an Internet marketing consultant in the New York area; to stand out, the band billed itself as "the largest rock 'n' roll group in the world."

The cheers and hand claps of the future Texas governor didn't make it to vinyl, unfortunately—the Screammers weren't formalized until after the album was recorded. But Bush may get another chance to rush the stage. "There's a quorum of Torqués available to play an inaugural ball," Hobler says, adding that if Bush is sworn in as president, the band will be happy to administer the Clapper Oath to him.

—T. Core Brennan





decide to sue for wrongful dismissal. States are required to prove a former employee guilty of egregious misconduct before they can deny unemployment benefits. But as an at-will employee, lacking a contract, Schmidt can be fired for any reason not barred by an employment discrimination statute—even, theoretically, for writing a dull book, not just a controversial one.

But if Schmidt did snatch a few minutes here and there to work on his book, he notes that there are compelling precedents in physics for such petty larceny. Where would physics be if Albert Einstein hadn't stolen a few moments from the Swiss Patent Office, where he was employed when he worked out the implications of relativity?

**CHRISTOPHER SHEA**

# LOGO CENTRISM

IN HER BOOK *NO LOGO*, NAOMI Klein writes that debates about corporate brands have become “the brand of politics capturing the imagination of the next generation of troublemakers.” Klein’s troublemakers might wish to visit London, where the exhibit *Brand.New* is currently on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Featuring Coca-Cola bottles from 1899 to 1994 and a pair of nineteenth-century Levi’s alongside contemporary Benetton marketing, the exhibit showcases consumer products and advertising campaigns in all their attention-grabbing color. Co-curator Jane Pavitt explains,

“We wanted to transform banal images into a comment on their banality.”

For those who miss the show, Princeton University Press has published an eponymous book that expands on the exhibit’s themes. In one essay, Aaron Betsky demonstrates how the proliferation of branded merchandise has led to the development of increasingly impersonal retail spaces such as the supermarket and the department store. Shorter articles provide snapshot studies of branding in a variety of contexts—from the British government’s attempts to “rebrand” the country’s stuffy national identity, to how store location in Beijing’s Sun Dong An Plaza re-creates the global “hierarchy of fashion labels.” Glossy images of billboards, malls, shopwindows, and advertisements adorn many of the

book’s oversize pages.

*Brand.New*’s balanced history yields two fundamental insights: First, that despite increasingly sophisticated methods of delivery, the basic messages of advertising and the core appeal of branded merchandise have changed little over the past century; and second, that over the same period, the prevalence of advertising and branded merchandise has exploded, penetrating into increasingly intimate corners of life. Commenting on late-nineteenth-century patent-medicine advertisements, Pavitt asserts, “The messages seem so primitive, so basic—‘Your life will be healthier, happier, better’—but we basically extract the same messages from the Nike swoosh or from Jennifer Aniston today.”

Yet perhaps there have been some changes. In her essay “In

## Facing the “King of Terrors”

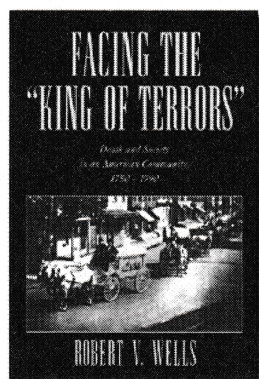
Death and Society in an American Community, 1750–1990

**Robert V. Wells**

*“Wells’s narrative is rich in particulars.”*

—Lingua Franca

*Facing the “King of Terrors”* examines changes in the roles and perceptions of death in one American community, Schenectady, New York, from 1750 to 1990. It combines an in-depth look at patterns of death in society as a whole with an investigation of personal responses to such cultural customs.



0-521-63319-2 Hardback \$44.95

Available at bookstores



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

40 West 20th Street,  
New York, NY 10011-4211  
Web site: [www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

## The Treatment Center of The New York Psychoanalytic Institute

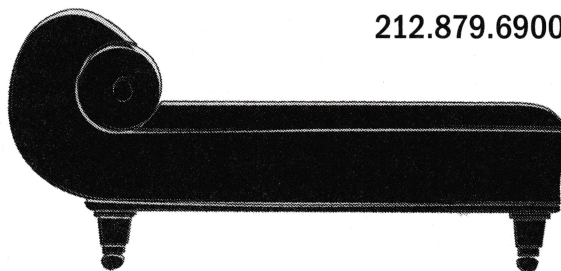
Psychoanalytic Treatment

at Affordable Rates

To Arrange for a Consultation

Contact Ms. Mary Hodes

212.879.6900



The Treatment Center of the Institute will offer psychoanalytic treatment at affordable fees for those who can benefit. Psychoanalysis is a form of talk therapy that is appropriate for a person who is having emotional problems or difficulties in relationships and is able to devote the time to seriously understanding themselves and the source of their problems. The treatment is conducted in private offices of experienced clinicians at a fee based on the person's income.